

AL.1. 1420
C.2

CANADIANA

JAN 12 1996

Assessment Highlights

Grade 9 English Language Arts



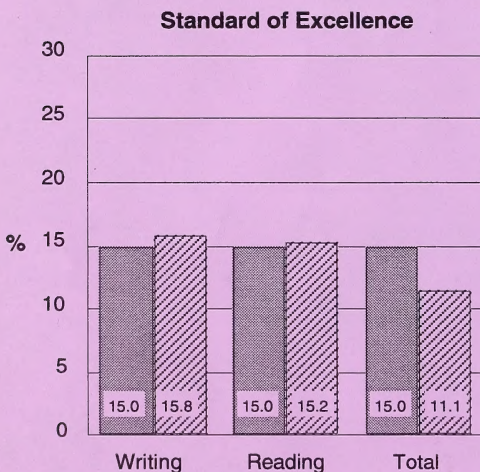
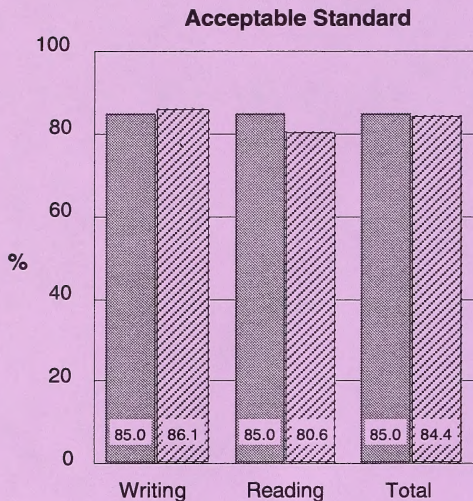
June 1995

Assessment Highlights

Grade 9 English Language Arts

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the results for the June 1995 Grade 9 English Language Arts provincial assessment. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

Percentage of Students Meeting:



■ Achievement Standards*

▨ Actual Results**

*the percentage of students in the province expected to meet the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence

**the percentage of students in the province who met standards (based on those who wrote)

Who Wrote the Test?

All students registered in Grade 9 were expected to write the 1995 English Language Arts Achievement Test. A total of 34 136 students completed the June 1995 assessment. This number reflects an increase of approximately 900 students over last year's administration of the achievement test. In 1995, only a small proportion of students in grade 9 did not write the test: 2.4% of students were absent, 2.6% of students were excused from writing by their superintendents, and an additional 2.3% of students wrote only one part of the test.

What Was the Test Like?

The test had two parts.

Part A: Writing provided students with printed song lyrics, accompanied by an audiotaped version of the song, as a prompt for their writing. Students chose the format (narrative, letter, editorial, or essay) that would allow them to do their best writing. This part of the test was scored in five categories: Content, Organization, Sentence Structure, Vocabulary, and Conventions. Content and Organization were weighted to be worth twice as much as each of the other categories.

Part B: Reading consisted of 65 multiple-choice questions based on reading selections that were either informational or narrative/poetic in nature.

How Well Did Students Do?

In writing, slightly more students than expected met the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence. In reading, fewer students than expected met the acceptable standard, while the number meeting the standard of excellence was in line with provincial expectations. For the total test, fewer students than expected met either standard.

In 13.3% of the schools, the percentage of students meeting the acceptable standard for the total test was significantly

above acceptable for the province. In 68.0% of the schools, the percentage of students meeting the acceptable standard was not significantly different from provincial expectations. In 18.7% of schools, the percentage of students meeting the acceptable standard was significantly below provincial expectations. Schools where fewer than five students wrote the Grade 9 test are not included in the calculations.

Detailed provincial assessment results are provided in school and jurisdiction reports.

Has Achievement Changed Since 1990?

A special study of changes in achievement was conducted as part of the provincial assessment. Results showed that achievement in reading in 1995 was somewhat higher than results in 1994 or 1990. In writing, however, results showed that achievement was not significantly different from either 1994 or 1990.

Part A: Writing

Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* shows the reporting categories (scoring guide), a description of the writing assignment, and the standards.

Reporting Category	Description of Writing Assignment	Standards
<p>*Content (Selecting Ideas and Details to Achieve a Purpose) The student should be able to respond to a selection of literature and communicate that response appropriately to a specified audience.</p> <p>*Organization (Organizing Ideas and Details into a Coherent Whole) The student should be able to organize the response effectively and coherently to produce a unified composition that achieves the student's purpose for writing.</p> <p>Sentence Structure (Structuring Sentences Effectively) The student should be able to use a variety of sentence types and structures to achieve clarity, interest, and emphasis.</p> <p>Vocabulary (Selecting and Using Words and Expressions Correctly and Effectively) The student should be able to use words and expressions appropriately and effectively to communicate to the specified audience and to achieve the student's purpose.</p> <p>Conventions (Using the Conventions of Written Language Correctly and Effectively) The student should be able to communicate clearly by adhering to appropriate spelling, punctuation, and grammar conventions.</p>	<p>The writing assignment is a response to song lyrics that are accompanied by an audiotape version. The student may use ideas from previous experience and/or reading. The assignment allows the student to select the format that would allow for his/her best writing.</p>	<p>The student's achievement in each reporting category will be described according to the following standard statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —meets the standard of excellence —approaches the standard of excellence —clearly meets the acceptable standard —does not clearly meet the acceptable standard —clearly below the acceptable standard INS—insufficient

*These categories were weighted to be worth twice as much as each of the others.

Observations and Results

The quality of the writing in English Language Arts in 1995 is quite similar to that of 1994. Teachers who marked the tests were generally pleased with most of the papers, which tended to be somewhat longer than those written in 1994. However, many teacher markers expressed concern with the number of papers that

did not specifically address the prompt. They believe that at the Grade 9 level students should be able to respond to a prompt in ways that are obvious to the reader.

At the central marking session, students' connections to the prompt were not always obvious. In the context of the classroom, this can be remedied through discussion with students; however, in the context of a provincial assessment, this is not possible. To ensure that students are not unfairly penalized, we instruct teachers to mark even those papers that appear not to address the prompt.

While students were successful in linking global issues to a central theme, many found it difficult to focus on one issue or event and to develop it fully. Rather than providing specific examples and perspectives on one issue, many students addressed a number of issues superficially, listing them catalogue style.

Students were able to show their awareness of the characteristic style, tone, and voice of the writing formats they selected. Many students used a rich vocabulary. The sophistication in student use of language indicates that they are encountering new vocabulary within their daily experiences and that they feel comfortable in taking risks to incorporate this new vocabulary in their writing.

Part B: Reading

Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part B: Reading* shows the reporting categories and language function under which questions are classified.

Reporting Category	Question Distribution by Language Function		Number of Questions
	Informational	Narrative/Poetic	
Main Ideas/Details The student should be able to construct meaning by attending to and interpreting ideas/details related to format cues and character (actions, motives, and values), setting, events, and conflict.	12, 27, 28, 31, 41, 55	2, 3, 6, 15, 19, 20, 37, 46, 47, 56, 58, 62	18
Organization of Ideas and Relationships between Form and Content The student should be able to demonstrate an understanding of literary forms; also, of the relationship between the author's intention and point of view and choice of form and writing style, and choice of organizational methods such as chronological order, cause/effect, comparison/contrast, foreshadowing, and flashback.	30	5, 14, 18, 33, 48, 57	7
Associating Meaning The student should be able to associate meanings of words and expressions from prior knowledge and contextual clues, understand the denotations and connotations of words and expressions, and determine the meaning and effect of figurative language.	13, 24, 25, 50, 52, 54	1, 16, 34, 35, 42, 43, 45, 60, 61	15
Synthesizing Ideas The student should be able to draw conclusions, make generalizations, and/or predict plausible outcomes by synthesizing information from an entire reading selection.	9, 10, 11, 26, 29, 32, 39, 40, 51, 53	4, 7, 8, 17, 21, 22, 23, 36, 38, 44, 49, 59, 63, 64, 65	25
Number of Questions	23	42	65

Observations and Sample Questions

The following is a discussion of specific areas of strength and weakness for students in Grade 9 classrooms. Sample questions from the test are provided to highlight these areas for students meeting the acceptable standard and for those meeting the standard of excellence for the reading component. For each sample question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk. These questions are no longer secured and will not be reused in 1996.

28. According to this article, Nellie McClung believed that
- * A. economic independence for women was important
 - B. women should be paid for housework
 - C. women should be prevalent in politics
 - D. Canada's laws should favour women
-
29. According to this article, the turning point in the suffragist movement was Nellie McClung's
- A. publication of her book, *Sowing Seeds in Danny*, in 1908
 - B. petition for women's rights
 - C. election to the legislature
 - * D. staging of the mock parliament on January 28, 1914

Acceptable Standard

For **question 28**, students had to locate key character details in the passage. Students who met the *acceptable standard* were able to do this.

For **question 29**, slightly less than 50% of students meeting the *acceptable standard* had difficulty drawing conclusions by synthesizing pertinent details from a reading selection.

The strengths of students who met the *acceptable standard* include an ability to

- understand the relationship among details in a reading selection
- identify directly stated details of setting and character
- infer character motivation

However, many of these students did not do as well as expected in

- inferring the meaning of words and phrases from the context of the materials
- making judgements about character motivation by synthesizing information in a reading selection
- drawing conclusions by synthesizing pertinent details from a reading selection
- judging the author's purpose and theme (see question 36)
- interpreting key details
- understanding selections that were not narrative in form (particularly poetry and cartoons)

Standard of Excellence

Students meeting the *standard of excellence* had no difficulty with the following sample questions, which tended to be difficult for those students meeting the *acceptable standard*.

Question 36 requires students to make a judgement about the author's theme in a poem. A large percentage (about 84%) of those students meeting the *standard of excellence* answered this question correctly.

36. The theme of the poem "Every Part of This Earth is Sacred" is
- A. apathy toward life
 - * B. reverence for the earth
 - C. the harshness of nature
 - D. joy in nature

37. The authors of these two poems speak with the

- A. enthusiasm of the young
- B. innocence of children
- * C. wisdom of the mature
- D. enthusiasm of the elders

Question 37 required students to interpret key details that would suggest the author's tone in a poem. Of those students meeting the *standard of excellence*, about 94% answered this question correctly.

Students who met the *standard of excellence* had very few difficulties with this assessment. These students could

- synthesize information from a selection to make inferences and judgements, and to draw conclusions
- recognize the meanings of words and phrases from the context of the material
- make judgements about the author's theme, purpose for writing, and tone (see questions 36 and 37)
- understand the author's point of view
- understand the selections that were not in narrative form: poems, cartoons, and charts

Comments

Student Collaboration Time Before Writing

This year, for the first time, students were allowed to discuss the writing prompt with classmates before writing. The majority of the teachers said that this is a very positive change because it reflects classroom practice and it provides a "comfort zone" for many students who suffer from test anxiety. This practice will be continued in the 1996 assessment.

Local Marking

Also for the first time this year, teachers were allowed to mark their own students' papers before returning them for central marking. Initial results are very encouraging. Approximately 45% of papers were marked locally and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. These papers received a second reading by markers at the central marking session. A high reliability was achieved for these papers. Papers found to be discrepant between first and second readings were given a third adjudicating read. The third reading rescore rate was less than 9%. As more teachers have the opportunity to become familiar with the provincial scoring criteria and standards, we expect that the number of teachers marking locally will increase.

Draft Versus Final Copy

Many teachers suggested that, in the future, students should be allowed to complete **one** copy of their writing, with revisions made directly on that copy. In the past, when both draft and final copies were required, most students would just recopy their original work, paying special attention to neatness rather than to improving the content or accuracy of what they had originally written. For 1996, we will expect a good first draft, preferably double spaced to accommodate changes more readily.

Resolving Administration Anomalies

Although we announced the new practice of reusing items from 1992, 1993, or 1994 tests, and the securing of these tests as late as October 1994, most schools were able to respond quickly and were successful in avoiding the use of these tests with students. Consequently, the 1995 testing was conducted effectively throughout Alberta without compromising the validity of the results. In a few schools, however, questions were raised about students' prior access to the test items and concerns were rightfully expressed about

fairness and accuracy. Superintendents were asked to investigate, along with school principals and teachers, these and all other non-standard testing practices brought to our attention and to make recommendations about the validity of results. Initially, 428 student results for Grade 9 Language Arts were reported as “not available,” pending further investigation due to validity concerns. In the end, results for only 2 students were determined to be invalid for Grade 9 Language Arts.

Release of Secured Items

As outlined in the General Information Bulletin, items from the achievement tests are secured except those that are released each year in the subject area bulletins. The items in these bulletins may be used to prepare students for the provincial assessment. The subject area bulletins are mailed to all schools in the fall.

Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing

Last spring, we sent schools copies of the *Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing* to distribute to parents through the students in grades 3, 6, and 9. The purpose was to support open communication about provincial standards and the testing program among the teacher, the student, and the parent. The guide included a tear-out card with several questions and space for comments. Parents returned over 2000 cards; about half included comments. Parents’ feedback about the learnings expected of students, the quality of questions on the tests, and the testing program was generally positive. Their written comments ranged from positive to negative, and many simply asked for more information. As parents seemed to appreciate this form of communication, we are looking for a way to make the guide available again later this school year.

Performance-Based Assessment

In addition to writing the achievement test, a random sample of students from across the province participated in performance-based assessments in **Language Arts 3, Mathematics 6, and Social Studies 9.**

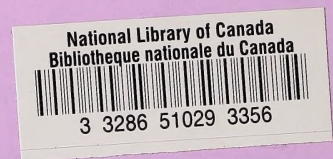
Performance-based assessment reports will be sent to participating schools and a summary of provincial results will be sent to all schools in November 1995. A “*Samples of Student Responses*” document for the performance-based assessments will be prepared and made available to all schools in the spring of 1996.

1995 Administration—A Note of Thanks

We at Student Evaluation wish to express our appreciation to you, the principals and teachers throughout Alberta, for the care and attention you gave to the administration of the 1995 achievement tests. Successful implementation of the expanded program and the changes in procedures and rules depended on your assistance and cooperation. We hope that you find the changes in the testing and the additional achievement information helpful in your work with students.

Credits

Cover photograph from *Practical Ideas for Teaching Writing as a Process*. Copyright 1986, 1987, California Department of Education, P. O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271. Reprinted by permission.



For further information, contact Jo-Anne Hug, Assessment Specialist or Dennis Belyk, Assistant Director at 403-427-0010. The toll-free number is 310-0000.



Printed November 1995